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June 26, 2000

Commissioner Jane Henney
Docket No. 00P-1211/CP1
FDA Dockets Management Branch
5650 Fishers Lane, Room 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Commissioner Henney,

I am writing this letter today to make the request that genetically engineered foods be clearly labeled so that consumers can make informed decisions about what they are buying and feeding themselves and their children, and for all new GE foods to be blocked from being sold on the open market until long-term tests have been done to explore their health and environmental effects.

There are a number of reasons why genetically engineered foods must be labeled. For example, certain religious groups object to the consumption of various types of foods- if such persons consume a fruit or vegetable that carries the genes of an animal that they are religiously opposed to consuming, their constitutional right to practice their religion has effectively been violated- not to mention their own practical observances of the religion. Furthermore, there have been studies done that show GE foods to cause allergic reactions and create new toxins. For people who are hypersensitive this could be a major health issue. Studies conducted by the DHHS, FDA and USDA also support negative effects of consuming genetically altered foods and/or garner inconclusive results.

For myself personally, I feel that altering nature in this manner is not biologically sound. When a product such as a strawberry has a gene from a salmon inserted into it to prevent it from freezing during a frost, changes are being made that would never occur in nature- a strawberry could never be fertilized by a salmon, nor could many other genetically engineered foods ever occur in nature because they cross species and even kingdom (i.e. animalia, plantae) lines.

In addition, genetic changes evolve at a much slower rate in nature than what is being done in the laboratory. In this sense, I see it as ecologically unsound to genetically engineer food products. The ecosystem of this planet is the result of co-evolution of all species upon it, so introducing species that have not occurred in nature presents a threat to the health of the planet's ecosystem, to which the effects are potentially devastating. We can simply witness a *naturally* occurring species being introduced to an ecosystem to

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which it is not a part in order to see the damage done- such as the Asian long horn beetles that infested trees on the north side of Chicago.

I think that in a democratic society such as this one, it is a travesty for our own government to make the pre-emptive decision not to inform its citizens about what they are in fact purchasing, especially if it poses a potential health threat. U.S. citizens should not be made the lab rats of a GE food "experiment." However, if consumers do begin to get ill from these foods, they would have grounds to take legal action in the same manner that cigarette smokers have done with big tobacco companies that failed to label their products as being hazardous to (human) health.

The reason given by government to justify not labeling GE foods is that it would unnecessarily cause consumers to panic and consequently stop purchasing them. I see that as a faulty reason that is more concerned with self-preservationist interests of large corporations rather than those of the common good. If people choose not to buy GE foods as a result, then so be it- is not the point of a free market economy to respond to consumer demand by supplying what the consumers want? I think that the American people are certainly intelligent enough to make rational decisions about what is in their best interest, and a democratic government has no right to do so.

If these foods truly are safe, as government claims, then there should be no big scare over labeling them- at very least for persons who are religiously or medically opposed to consuming certain foods, if for nobody else in this country.

As an American citizen and registered voter, I feel that it is my right to know what I am buying at the supermarket, and fully support any legislation that calls for the stringent testing and accurate labeling of all genetically engineered food products. I support any measures that the Food and Drug Administration can take to help bring this about. I understand the arguments that have been made in favor of genetically modified food products, but we should at least have the right to make an informed choice. I hope you can lend your support to this pressing issue.

Sincerely,

Neda Eftekhari

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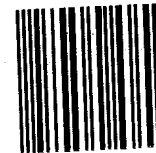
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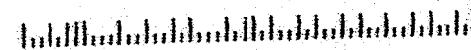
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To: Commissioner Jane Henney
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